

***The Arizona Republic* Editorial**
The Issue: Uranium Mining Moratorium
“Protecting Our Treasure”

January 11, 2012

More than 26 million people should be applauding.

The Interior Department gave extra protection to their water supply, the Colorado River, with a 20-year ban on new uranium-mining claims around the Grand Canyon.

It was just one of the compelling reasons for the order, signed Monday by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar that extends a temporary moratorium protecting 1 million acres of federal land in northern Arizona.

Water: Besides drinking water, the Colorado River is a vital source for farming, industry and recreation. But its watershed is a fractured, interconnected geology that is just too vulnerable to contamination. And flash floods can carry tons of uranium-laced debris into tributaries of the Colorado, as happened in 1984.

Wildlife: Hunting and fishing groups raised the alarm over the threat to wildlife of additional noise, habitat fragmentation, pollution and disruptions in water supply.

Tourism: The Grand Canyon is Arizona's premier destination and a foundation block of our tourist economy. Many of the claims already filed, which would not be affected by the ban, are within a few miles of Grand Canyon National Park.

Roads: The ore would be trucked to mills in Utah, using highways that are crowded enough already. An accident, with all the challenge of cleaning up hazardous materials, could cause major traffic disruption.

Compared with the huge potential risk, the benefits of lifting the moratorium would have been slim.

The extra mining jobs would have increased overall employment in the area by less than 1 percent.

The public wouldn't have gotten a penny's profit from uranium taken off public land: Under antiquated federal law, companies pay no royalties for "hard-rock" minerals.

It's not as if the U.S. doesn't have any uranium outside the Grand Canyon area. Arizona, Colorado and Utah combined (they aren't separated to protect proprietary information) have just 14 percent of domestic reserves. And the ban affects only 12 percent of the uranium available in northern Arizona.

Some members of Congress argue that a 1984 law designating wilderness in northern Arizona included some sort of deal to allow mining everywhere else. But that's not in the law or any other document. Nearly three decades later, a spike in uranium prices has led to a surge of mining claims around the Grand Canyon. It would be reckless to leave the land uses frozen in time.

We can't afford to take risks with this unique spot, with its unique importance to the economy of an entire region.

The mining ban deserves applause.